

PAJ OIL SPILL SYMPOSIUM 2006 - " CHANGING STRATEGIES IN REGIONAL OIL SPILL RESPONSE"

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SHIFTING RISKS AND THEIR IMPACT ON PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

In 2001, the PAJ symposium addressed and examined changes in global response systems following several significant pollution incidents (such as from the NAKHODKA and ERIKA) and the introduction of the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation 1990 (OPRC 90). Five years later, the 2006 symposium revisits developments and focuses on the increasing regionalisation of preparedness as a result of shifting risk patterns.

With seaborne trade increasing and over 60% of oil consumed globally in 2005 transported by sea, one could assume that oil pollution from ships is equally increasing. On the contrary however, statistics continue to show that the overall number of oil spills is decreasing along with the overall volume of oil spilled during marine pollution accidents. While reasons are many and diverse, the implementation of legislation aiming at the protection of the marine environment has been a significant factor.

Nevertheless, more complex trade patterns have shifted the hotspots of pollution risk geographically. New challenges for pollution response have arisen from the focus on heavy fuel oils carried as bunkers and other substances such as emulsified oils or hazardous and noxious substances (HNS). Under OPRC, improved planning for prevention and preparedness at national and regional levels has had to be developed, involving a multitude of stakeholders and taking into account changing strategies. In this regard, a shift can be observed from the previous system of tier 1 level stockpiles supported by international industry tier 3 centres. Improved risk assessments have led to planning for 'most probable' scenarios and requirements for an effective, timely response. Increasingly there is now a focus on setting up tier 2 bases near sites of particular risk or concern.

With equipment often no longer being the limiting factor, the issues tend to be those of command and control and the experience and training of response personnel. There also remains the crucial point of integrated planning. Integration across agencies and administrative levels can be complex, in particular when competencies and responsibilities are to be determined and general policies discussed. OPRC has been an effective tool to catalyse developments since experience has shown that functional national contingency plans need to be in place before regional cooperation can become truly fruitful. The establishment of regional centres such as the Mer/Rac (Marine Environmental Emergency Preparedness and Response Regional Activity Centre) for the Northwest Pacific Region further facilitates international co-operation and allows for technical assistance by the likes of UNEP and IMO.